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ABSTRACT

In the Fall of 1982, Drexel University introduced a new educational program for the 1983-84 academic year that required every freshman to have access to a personal computer for use in all areas of the curriculum. The computer selected was the 128K Macintosh. As of January 1985, approximately 5,000 students, faculty, and staff on the Drexel campus had their own Macintoshs. As a result, a number of new facilities and services have been set up. Among the many forms of support provided to students, faculty, and staff users are a telephone hotline and a walk-in consulting service. These services are provided through the Microcomputer User Support Group (MUSG), a part of the Drexel University Computer Center. This document describes the hotline and walk-in consulting services and includes: Service Hours; Telephone Hotline Service (organization, background, calling volume and phone service, student distribution, hotline staff, and service characteristics); Walk-In Consulting Service (background and organization, service characteristics, staff communications, consultant's manual, formal and supplementary documentation, staff meetings, and mail folders); Staff Training; Usage Statistics; and The Future of the Services. (THC)

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Hotline and Walk-In Consulting

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Hotline and Walk-In Consulting

In the Fall of 1982, Drexel University introduced a dramatic, new educational program for the 1983-84 academic year. This new program requires every freshman to have access to a personal computer for use in all areas of the curriculum. The goal of this comprehensive program is to provide every Drexel student with the resources and training necessary to meet the challenges of the future - a future in which effective use of computers will be essential in virtually every field. The computer selected was the 128K Macintosh.

As of January, 1985, less than one year from the time the first Macintosh arrived, approximately 5,000 students, faculty, and staff on the Drexel campus have their own Macs. This number is expected to double in the next two years. As a result, a number of new facilities and services have been set up.

Among the many forms of support provided to students, faculty, and staff users are a telephone hotline and a walk-in consulting service. These services are provided through the Microcomputer User Support Group (MUSG), a part of the Drexel University Computer Center that specializes in the Macintosh computer. All members of the Drexel community may use these services.

The MUSG has a staff of 2 full-time professionals, 25-30 part-time students, and 12 full-time cooperative student employees.[1] Student employees perform hotline and walk-in consulting services. If a consultant is unable to answer a question or solve a problem, the consultant refers the user to a student expert or an MUSG professional.

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[1]Students in the cooperative education program at Drexel work in business or industry for two of every four terms they are in school. Since the cooperative education cycle is semiannual, new cooperative student employees are hired every six months. Students will often return to work as part-time student employees after they have completed their co-op cycle.

SERVICE HOURS

The microcomputing services operate according to the following schedule. This schedule may be changed, however, to accommodate user needs, University holidays, and term breaks.

Monday-Friday	8am - 10pm
Saturday	10am - 6pm
Sunday	noon - 9pm

TELEPHONE HOTLINE SERVICE

Organization. The Micro Hotline is a university phone service staffed by student consultants. The hotline is advertised as one local phone number, with four separate lines in the "hunt group." That is, if a user dials the hotline number and it is busy, the system will automatically hunt for the next available telephone line. One consultant is assigned to each phone line. Each desk in the hotline/walk-in consulting facility is equipped with one phone and one Macintosh terminal.

Background. To establish the Micro Hotline, we considered the following factors:

- the volume of calls we would expect to receive from students
- the type of phone service available to us for the hotline
- the geographic distribution of the students
- the most effective organization of the hotline staff

Calling volume and phone service. To ensure adequate service for all Drexel students, we considered several characteristics of the calls we might receive on the hotline. For instance, how many phone calls might be expected from 2500 students who are working with the Macintosh for the first time? What time of day will students call? Telephone company representatives told us that if every student made one five-minute call between 6 pm and 10 pm (the peak homework hours), and there were eight lines available, we would short-circuit the local telephone network. Nevertheless, we decided to set up

eight lines to answer calls. We have discovered it is rare if more than two lines are busy simultaneously. This data surprised us at first, and we attributed it to the "user- friendly" nature of the Macintosh. Furthermore, a study completed by Dr. Elliot Cole, a professor in Drexel's College of Information Studies, and additional individual reports, indicate students are more likely to consult their peers for computer help before they consult the hotline. Consequently, we reduced the number of phone lines from eight to four.

Student distribution. Students from all areas of the Delaware Valley, (Delaware, New Jersey, and southeastern Pennsylvania), enroll at Drexel; fifty percent of these students commute. Should special provisions, such as WATS lines, be provided for students who must make long distance calls? The impending AT&T divestiture, and the exorbitant interstate phone rates discouraged us from using WATS or other comparable services. We have found we do not receive an adequate volume of long distance calls to warrant the installation of WATS lines.

Hotline staff. Each hotline consultant uses a Macintosh terminal and a telephone headset which enables them to work on the Macintosh while they are speaking on the phone. In addition, the consultants are required to record every problem and solution they encounter each day onto problem log sheets (Fig. 2). We hoped that the log sheets would provide a template for staff training and communications. In fact, log sheets have become one of the major sources of information for consultants and for usage statistics (see sections below).

Service characteristics. The Hotline service receives a variety of phone calls concerning every aspect of the Macintosh and the Microcomputing Program, although no one type of problem is more frequently asked than another. In a typical week, the hotline receives approximately 42 phone calls. The second and third weeks of the Fall term, Hotline consultants can expect to receive 100 calls per week because the new freshmen are still unfamiliar with their microcomputers.

Hotline questions generally reflect the user's expertise and familiarity with the Macintosh, though some types of questions are more prevalent

during certain weeks in the term than during others. Word processing questions, for instance, are quite prevalent before the first paper is due in the freshman writing class. Questions concerning disk space arise during the second and third weeks of the term; the freshmen have just received their hardware, and many are trying to create storage and classwork disks. Questions regarding MUSG facilites and policies are less frequently asked, but are asked consistently throughout the eleven week term.

WALK-IN CONSULTING SERVICE

Background and organization. The walk-in consulting and hotline services are located in the same area. Originally, consultants performed either hotline or walk-in consulting, but we soon realized it wasn't necessary to separate these functions. Now, the four student consultants perform both tasks: answering a hotline call or working with an individual who has come in for hands-on assistance.

Walk-in consulting is also available in a number of work clusters on campus. Clusters are rooms equipped with Macintoshes, software, and documentation where students and faculty may work independently. If a user has a question or problem, he may approach the consultant's desk, or he may ask the consultant to help him at his terminal.

Service characteristics. The questions received at the walk-in facility are not very different from questions received by the Micro Hotline. This service receives more questions concerning programming languages and problems with damaged files and disks, however, because the consultants are more likely to require the actual product in their hands in order to be able to help the user.

The walk-in consulting facility is more likely to receive questions about course-specific software. Course-specific software is either created and produced at Drexel or is a class assignment which uses commercial software. For example, students may be assigned to create a spreadsheet for an accounting or economics class using the commercial software, Multiplan™. To a certain extent, consulting for courses is the most difficult type of consulting.

Student employees are trained to address only the technical and procedural issues of the assignment - not the subject matter of the assignment. We ask our consultants to refer users with questions on the content of an assignment to that student's instructor.

Staff communications. The information available to the hotline and walk-in consultants is a very important aspect of Drexel's MUSG consulting service. Consultants require information to answer several types of questions: For instance, a consultant may receive questions regarding the Microcomputing program, ("Where do I pay for my printer and when can I pick it up?"); software packages ("How do I create a top margin on my paper?"); or the Macintosh system ("How can I recover from this error?"). It is important that the consultant's solutions and information are current as well as accurate.

Inter-staff communication occurs via six main avenues: the Consultant's Manual, formal documentation, supplementary documentation, the *Consultant's Weekly* newsletter, staff meetings, and mail folders.

Consultant's manual. Every consultant receives a Consultant's Manual when he is hired by MUSG. This manual contains a description of the consulting services and outlines the procedures and policies of MUSG. Excerpts from the table of contents from Consultant's Manual is shown in Fig.1.

Table of Contents from the Consultant's Manual

MUSG Employment

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The Cluster Consultant

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The Walk-in and Hotline Consultant

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Figure 1.

Formal and supplementary documentation. The consultant has access to a variety of information. In addition to formal software documentation, there is a loose-leaf binder containing tips, procedures, and articles, organized by subject area. These binders are located at every consultant's desk.

Consultant's Weekly. Consultants also receive the *Consultant's Weekly*, a newsletter which reports recent problems and solutions, operational changes, jokes, tips, and departmental announcements. Most of this information is gleaned from computer magazines, various newsletters, word-of-mouth, and problem log sheets. The newsletter also includes articles written by MUSG members, which have been submitted to the school newspaper.

Staff meetings. Consultants are required to attend weekly staff meetings to exchange the previous week's ideas, information, and problems. During these meetings, the consultants discuss any problems they may have encountered that week, and learn any new MUSG operational procedures.

Mail folders. We have found we are able to maintain continuous communication with our consultants via personal mail folders. The consultants' Pendaflex mail folders are kept in a designated drawer of a file cabinet in the MUSG office. Consultants receive newsletters, memos, announcements, and time sheets in their folders. Mail folders are an excellent method of communicating with a fluctuating staff of student consultants.

STAFF TRAINING

Before a student assumes active consulting duties, he must complete one week of intensive training regarding software packages supported by the Microcomputing Program and general consulting topics, including techniques, facilities, and procedures.

In addition, all consultants receive training at their weekly staff meeting. MUSG professionals introduce short training topics, new software, and new techniques for the Macintosh. We also administer periodic training

(affectionately known as "quizzes" among the consultants), which ensure us the consultants have acquired the necessary skills to use a software package.

USAGE STATISTICS

The MUSG records a variety of statistical data concerning its services. Walk-in and hotline consultants log every question they receive on a problem log sheet (Fig.2).

For each problem, the consultants record:

* service used (hotline or walk-in)
* date and time of day
* problem category (hardware, applications software, programming, general Mac policies or procedures)
* problem description.

The MUSG uses these log sheets to analyze several statistics for each of its services:

* number of questions received per hour
* number of questions in each category
* percentage of questions in each category
* total number of questions received daily and weekly

These data allow us to institute effective policies, services, and budgets, which meet the needs of Drexel's microcomputing community.

We also record data concerning the use of the cluster areas. Student and faculty cluster stat sheets indicate peak usage hours for the microcomputers fall between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Generally, more students than faculty use the microcomputers provided at the MUSG facility. This is normal, since many faculty members have a Macintosh terminal in their offices or departments. In contrast, most of the students who use the cluster terminals are upper classmen who are not eligible to purchase a

Hotline ☐ Walkin ☐

PROBLEM LOG SHEET

Date___/___/___ Day Su M T W Th F Sa Time____:____ A.M. P.M.

Male ☐ Female ☐ Course Number _____

Faculty ☐ Student ☐ Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Pre-Junior ☐ Junior ☐ Senior ☐

Hardware	MacWrite	Multiplan	Programming/ Applications	Other
☐ General ☐ Keyboard ☐ Mouse ☐ MainUnit	☐ General ☐ File ☐ Edit ☐ Search ☐ Format ☐ Fonts ☐ Other _____	☐ General ☐ File ☐ Edit ☐ Select ☐ Format ☐ Options ☐ Calculate ☐ Other _____	☐ General ☐ MacBasic ☐ MacPascal ☐ Fortran ☐ Font Editor/ Mover ☐ Disk Copy ☐ Guided Tours ☐ Drexel Disk ☐ Other_____	☐ Operating System ☐ Disk Problems ☐ Facilities ☐ Printers/ Printing ☐ Policy ☐ Miscellaneous _____
MacPaint ☐ General ☐ Edit ☐ Font ☐ File ☐ Style ☐ Other_____				

QUESTION: _____

ANSWER: _____

(If there isn't enough space for the question and/or the answer, please use the back of this sheet.)

Consultant _____ Reviewed by _____

Level of Difficulty 1 2 3 4 5
(Circle one)

Figure 2.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Macintosh. Cluster use is heaviest by far just before the end of the term, when students must meet various project deadlines; however, usage throughout the rest of the term is quite consistent - approximately 750 users per day. The consulting tasks in the cluster areas are not trivial.

THE FUTURE OF THE SERVICES

Every year, an increasing number of students will acquire the Macintosh: undoubtedly, the microcomputer consulting services will expand to meet the needs of these students. Our growth will be limited, however, by an increasing network of students who will help each other with their Macintosh problems.

The MUSG will be expanding and enhancing its services in other areas. We are planning to establish an outreach program which will target the dormitories, and attempt to identify and assist students who are not comfortable confessing their difficulties with "the machine that's so easy to use." In addition, Macintosh users at Drexel will be able to access Macintosh tips and user information with keyword searches on a "Macintosh Information" database service. This service will be based on one of the campus' minicomputers, and we expect it will further improve staff and user communications.

Drexel's microcomputing program continues to branch to new territories. The university will continue to acquire new software and hardware which require user support. Thus, as the university administration explores new ideas and the most progressive techniques in microcomputing, we are confident the MUSG will continue to progress in this same manner.